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## INTERCHANGEABLE DIMENSIONS OF THE MEGALOPOLIS. THE WORLD OF DREAMS IN KAZUHIRO GOSHIMA'S FILM „DIFFERENT CITIES”

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Once upon a time, I Chuang Chou, dreamt I was a butterfly, fluttering hither and thither, a veritable butterfly, enjoying itself to the full of its bent, and not knowing it was Chuang Chou. Suddenly I awoke, and came to myself, the veritable Chuang Chou. Now I do not know whether it was then I dreamt I was a butterfly, or whether I am now a butterfly dreaming I am a man. Between me and the butterfly there must be a difference. This is an instance of transformation<sup>1</sup>.

Chuang Chou (c. 330 B.C.)

### INTRODUCTION: DREAMS IN JAPANESE CULTURE

The descriptions of dream experiences have a very special place among other Asian philosophical writings. The presented quotation of a Chinese philosopher Chuang Chou (c. 369 B.C. – c. 286 B.C.) raises the question that also appears in Japanese cultural texts: is it possible that one's life is someone else's dream?<sup>2</sup> Under the influence of the Chinese doctrine, this idea also became the core of Japanese religious and philosophical thinking about the role of dreams. The first Japanese descriptions and interpretations of the nighttime visions can be found in the medieval stories transmitted orally during the Kamakura (1185–1333) and Muromachi (1336–1573) periods. Later the narratives were organized into collections<sup>3</sup> and gained popularity among all Japanese social classes. The dreams depicted in these stories were intangibly connected with religious experiences of Buddhism believers. The world of night fantasies was, according to the testimonies of the medieval dreamers, the place where

<sup>1</sup> W. E. Soothill, *The Three Religions of China: Lectures Delivered at Oxford*, London 1913, p. 75. Quotation translated by J. Legee.

<sup>2</sup> H. Kawai, *Dreams, Myths and Fairy Tales in Japan*, Einsiedeln 1995, p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> Ibidem, pp. 17–18. Among many examples *Uji Shui Monogatari* and *Myōe Shonin Yume* are worth mentioning.

they often met sacred men (*bodhisattva*) disguised as animals or members of the society. Moreover, the main, continually repeated motif described by the narrators was the journey to the land of death<sup>4</sup> and its implications. The symbolic visitation of hell had a didactic meaning, as the most important among its effects was the change in the dreamer's perception. Traveling deep into the world of dreams was supposed to help the visitor to change (or understand) his life. Those who experienced multiple realities in their dreams were able to solve the problems they encountered in everyday situations, as the dreams allowed to observe their deeds from different angles. The Buddhist way of perceiving dreams as a key to uncover the mystery of existence in the "real world" through analyzing actions taken by the dreamer in the visions stimulated the metacognitive abilities of the believers and strengthened their faith<sup>5</sup>. The most vibrant and awaited dream experience was to approach the Buddha himself, because it gave the feeling of the presence of sacred power in one's life<sup>6</sup>. Obviously, not all dreams had a religious meaning but, as Kelly Bulkeley observes in her book, also the act of interpretation alone was worth performing, as searching for the spiritual meaning of the vision developed the knowledge of Buddhist iconography and possible ways of reading the dreams in the future<sup>7</sup>.

In case of this research Japanese language terminology connected with dreams and dreaming is also worth mentioning. The closest Japanese equivalent of an English word "dream" is *yume* (夢)<sup>8</sup>, though it also means "vision" and "illusion". It can be observed that in Japanese language all three states of mystical experience are covered by one term, while English definitions clearly differentiate the meaning of these words<sup>9</sup>. The verb "to dream" is recognized in Japanese as *yumemiru* (夢見る), while the ending *-miru* (見る)<sup>10</sup> appears also as an independent verb which means "to see" or "to observe". The fact that in Japanese language dreams "are observed" helps to understand the aforementioned didactic meaning of dreams. From the perspective of language the dreamer is only an observer of his dream, thus cannot actively change the course of events and, as the dream is a vision, it is created by an unknown power. The only thing the observer can do is to participate and try to understand what is unveiled to him.

## KAZUHIRO GOSHIMA – A VISUAL CREATOR AND HIS CONCEPTS

In the XX century the discourse about the role of dreams and dreaming in Japanese culture appeared in the cinema, creating completely new opportunities for presenting traditional and philosophical beliefs. The examples of the nighttime visions, as

<sup>4</sup> Ibidem, p. 19.

<sup>5</sup> K. Bulkeley, *Dreaming in the World's Religions: A Comparative History*, London, New York 2008, p. 95.

<sup>6</sup> Ibidem, p. 96.

<sup>7</sup> Ibidem, p. 97.

<sup>8</sup> B. Nowak, *Słownik znaków japońskich*, Warszawa 1995, p. 245.

<sup>9</sup> According to *Cambridge Dictionary* [on-line:] <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/> [29.02.2016].

<sup>10</sup> B. Nowak, op. cit., p. 73.

well as plots concerning travel to the world of dreams, can be found in almost every movie genre in the history of Japanese cinematography. However, creating dreamlike surroundings and situations became the most popular strategy used by Japanese avant-garde and experimental cinema filmmakers.

Kazuhiro Goshima, the author of *Different Cities*<sup>11</sup>, can be introduced as one of the experimental cinema directors pursuing the new methods of presenting the surreal cities and their inhabitants. Before the Japanese artist created his longest film (59 minutes), he produced shorter videos and media content. He started his visual experiments in 1996, recording the first video of the series entitled *FADE into WHITE*<sup>12</sup>. After the four years break from artistic work, between 2000 and 2003, Goshima finished his first series of experimental 3DCG's works. *FADE into WHITE #2*<sup>13</sup> received the grand prize at the Image Forum Festival in 2001, while *FADE into WHITE #3*<sup>14</sup> won an award at the Annecy International Animation Festival<sup>15</sup>. His first black and white videos were maintained in dream poetics, presenting everyday tools from different angles, encouraging the viewer to contemplate the pictures again and again. The sharp contrast between the presented objects and their surroundings causes in a feeling of transfiguration, while the common objects turn into abstraction<sup>16</sup>. Moreover, focusing on one particular thing resembles the dream vision in which the participant is unable to drag himself away from the contemplated object.

After the success of his animated movies Goshima turned into the experimental presentations of urban environment and its interchangeable dimensions. In 2004 the artist recorded his first video in color. *Z reactor*<sup>17</sup> presents the images of hidden parts of Tokyo (backyards, narrow streets, staircases) mixed with the hustle and bustle of noisy crossroads and modern buildings. As the author states on his website, his main aim was to convey the sense of movement and three-dimensionality. In his project overlapping still-frame images recreate the feeling of walking through the unreal city of dreams<sup>18</sup> where time and space are disfigured by the unknown power. The second movie of the series, *Desktop reactor*<sup>19</sup>, is a compilation of ideas used by the author in *FADE into White* and *Z reactor* movies. In this film the repeated camera movement focuses on the objects stored on the author's desk.

<sup>11</sup> K. Goshima, *Different Cities*, color, 59 min., Tokyo 2006.

<sup>12</sup> Idem, *FADE into WHITE #1*, B&W, 5 min., 1996.

<sup>13</sup> Idem, *FADE into WHITE #2*, B&W, 11 min., 2000.

<sup>14</sup> Idem, *FADE into WHITE#3*, B&W, 20 min., 2003.

<sup>15</sup> All the information is available on Kazuhiro Goshima's website [on-line:] [http://www.goshiman.com/hp/04profile\\_e.html](http://www.goshiman.com/hp/04profile_e.html) [20.02.2016].

<sup>16</sup> J. Vacheron, *Kazuhiro Goshima: After the Metabolic Cities* [in:] *12<sup>th</sup> Biennial of Moving Images in Geneva*, Genève 2012, pp. 42–43.

<sup>17</sup> K. Goshima, *Z reactor*, color, 11 min., 2004.

<sup>18</sup> Kazuhiro Goshima's website [on line:] [http://www.goshiman.com/hp/04profile\\_e.html](http://www.goshiman.com/hp/04profile_e.html) [20.02.2016].

<sup>19</sup> K. Goshima, *Desktop reactor*, flash animation, color, 5 min., 2006.

In 2006 Goshima decided to step up and created *Different Cities* in which he presented the megalopolis frozen at a precise moment, leaving the people there completely overwhelmed and lost in an urban environment similar to the world of uncanny dreams. Surprisingly, after the premiere the artist came back to working on short projects and visual installations. He continually develops his directing skills and remains interested in the experimental presentations of the city along with its inhabitants. Recently<sup>20</sup> Kazuhiro Goshima has visited Chile, Austria and Indonesia where he promoted his newest visual installation *This May Not Be A Movie*<sup>21</sup>.

## DREAMS OF REPETITION

Before the analysis of *Different Cities* will be presented, it is worth placing Goshima's vision in the wider context of anthropological research on dreams and dreaming in Japan. In 1958 an American anthropologist Richard M. Griffith published the results of research conducted together with Miyagi Otoy and Akira Tago from Tokyo Institute of Technology concerning the universality of typical dreams in Japanese and American societies<sup>22</sup>. Griffith stated that there exist repeated themes of dreams shared by many people, but the frequency of the certain dreams depends on the culture that the dreamers represent<sup>23</sup>. The results (presented in the table in the order of overall percentage response) showed a striking fact that the most popular dream named by Japanese male respondents<sup>24</sup> was the one classified as "trying again and again to do something"<sup>25</sup>. In his research Griffith does not present a complex analysis of the gathered data, assuming that his point of view could inflict the results. As the researcher stated in his final thoughts, the dream questionnaire was only an anthropological instrument designed to understand the relationships between the culture and the universality of dreams<sup>26</sup>.

However, in context of Kazuhiro Goshima's *Different Cities*, the presented research data gain additional meaning. The main point depicted by the Japanese director is the vision of people caught in the dream metropolis where they are unable to break their routine activities<sup>27</sup>. In this case, comparing the theme of Goshima's work to Griffith's inquiry, it is visible that the Japanese artist showed people imprisoned in the worst dream that, according to the survey, reoccurs in Japanese culture.

<sup>20</sup> Goshima visited mentioned countries in 2015.

<sup>21</sup> K. Goshima, *This May Not Be A Movie*, installation art, 2014.

<sup>22</sup> R. M. Griffith, *The Universality of Typical Dreams: Japanese vs. Americans*, "American Anthropologist" 1958, Vol. 60, Issue 6, pp. 1173–1179.

<sup>23</sup> Ibidem, p. 1173.

<sup>24</sup> In Griffith's research female respondents indicated that, on the first place, they dreamt about "teachers and school" (96.7%) and "being attacked and pursued" (92.2%). A dream of "trying again and again to do something" was on the third place with 82.5% of answers.

<sup>25</sup> Ibidem, p. 1177.

<sup>26</sup> Ibidem, pp. 1178–1179.

<sup>27</sup> J. Vacheron, op. cit., pp. 42–43.

The film starts with a sequence of a man designing the architectural elements of the city landscape. His project, which at the beginning is in the draft phase, is being developed constantly during the film action. As it is shown later, the designer is not a part of the nightmare – his role is to create it. The man's demiurgic powers integrate the megalopolis and it is him who decides about the shape of the urban environment. Here Goshima clearly presents the answer to the question brought in the quotation introduced at the top of this paper. The Japanese director contemplates the situation in which all the living people are imprisoned in someone else's (and yet more powerful) dream. It is worth indicating that the creator in Goshima's film does not express any attitude towards his "prisoners". The only emotional expression that can be seen is connected with the difficulties of his project. He seems to be a hard-working person, fully devoted to his vision, who spends all day locked in an ascetic workroom.

Futuristic metropolis created by the working man for the first glance seems to be completely normal. However, in the closer look it can be observed that the road signs, lights and subway maps are blurred into strange configurations<sup>28</sup>. Also, parts of the city look unfinished – covered with mist or too geometric to be real. These are the spots that the demiurge is going to finish during the next stages of his project.

At the beginning of his film Goshima introduces the characters who are not able to realize that they have been imprisoned in the dream of repetition. The protagonists have no distinctive features – they could be called the "Everyman" types. Also, their habitual actions could be classified as "daily routines". Firstly, the audience gets acquainted with a man who is looking for his way among the buildings. His body suddenly appears on the screen, while his surroundings are still gaining shape. The movement visible in this scene resembles the teleportation into virtual reality sequences, characteristic for cyberpunk cinema<sup>29</sup>. When the wandering man starts his stroll, he passes other pedestrians on the streets where all facilities work perfectly well. But the character seems to be confused and keeps asking himself "Where was I? What is this place?". He tries to understand his situation, but when he approaches the woman passing by, he is unable to articulate any question. The man also experiences time suspension, as he cannot suit himself to the city's pace. The viewer notices that everybody moves too fast or too slow, leaving the wandering man unable to communicate with others. It is also impossible for the protagonist to choose the direction, because when he decides to do so, he suddenly moves backwards. He keeps wandering through the busy streets, underground car parks and narrow staircases in his never ending search for the meaning of the world around. His repetition nightmare is associated with the alienation he suffers from.

During his stroll the protagonist meets another lost person – a woman looking for her cat. He is observing her efforts to trace white cat's paw prints left on the pavements and walls. As the viewer can assume, the woman is in a better situation than

<sup>28</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>29</sup> Similar technical solutions can be found in Wachowski sisters' *The Matrix* (1999) or *The Lawnmower Man* (1992) by Brett Leonard.

the first character – she is able to recognize the aim of her actions in the metropolis. She also possesses a “reminder” of her pet – a little neck bell attached to her purse. All along the search the woman seems extremely calm and reserved, as she could not be able to believe in a successful outcome of her pursuit. She also does not articulate anything, so it can be assumed that she has forgotten the name of the animal. The seeker is observed by other people, but she does not pay attention to them, focused on the prints. Her repetition nightmare manifests itself in the way that she often ends up in front of the high walls or other places impossible to reach. When the prints appear on the walls of the buildings, the woman is forced to find another way or trace what means that she has to come back to the beginning point (by moving backwards) and try another route. The final point of her nightmarish situation comes when she finds the trace leading to a small cat’s grave marked by a simple white cross. However, instead of stopping there, she chooses other trace, what starts the observation process displaying different possibilities of a sudden death of her pet. It can be noticed that the animal died because of the incomplete city’s architecture. For example, in one possible reality he drowned after jumping into the river. But the woman looking for a conceptual beacon is unable to leave the dream. She is determined to solve the mystery of the reality, but she is not in the possession of knowledge and tools to do so.

The next character introduced to the viewer is a geometer. Among all presented people, he is the one capable of understanding the laws of the repetition dream. His curious nature encourages him to spend his days on measuring the angles of the buildings. The geometer also observes nature and listens to the sounds transmitted by the city facilities. As the viewer realizes later, the man recognizes the music that the other characters listen to in their car. The music in Goshima’s film takes the role of a medium connecting people lost in their dreams. Even though they do not know each other, the repeated melody creates the connection between the protagonists’ stories and the dimensions of the dream reality. Finally, following the sound and conducting the research, the geometer comes out with his own philosophical hypotheses. He establishes his theory by comparing the results of arithmetic<sup>30</sup> with the photographs he took. The surroundings visible on the pictures differs from what is perceived in “reality”. The geometer understands that the relations between the buildings and the geographical criteria have evaporated. As a result of the investigation, the man is conscious of being captured in a dream but it does not make him powerful enough to leave the world of repetition. The nightmare is gone, though the man is still imprisoned, as he has not discovered the way out yet. Having no more ideas of what he should do next, the geometer chooses to sit on the bench and contemplate.

The next scene depicts the travelling couple striving to find their way through tangled motorways. At the beginning they seem to enjoy the trip – they are admiring high buildings and urban architectural sprawl. They listen to a calm (but continually repeated) song – the one that was transmitted to the geometer. The couple loses their nerves when they try to use the map to find the best road to turn to. Suddenly

<sup>30</sup> Ibidem.

the camera depicts the man wandering through the city as he visits the bookstore. He reaches for the car atlas and shows that on the map the motorway abruptly ends. There is nothing beyond the boundary of the city, as the whole project has not been finished yet. The viewer can assume that the couple, despite their efforts, will not be able to find a proper way. They are caught in the repetition nightmare well known from the popular culture<sup>31</sup> but refreshed and presented in an experimental way.

The last characters imprisoned in the world of dreams are the graphic designers. They decide to have a break from their work and they plan to leave their office to get some refreshments. They have no sense of the passing of time as their movements are presented in different tempos (normal, too slow or accelerated). What is more, one of the men admits not to be able to tell the time, even though he works on a computer, so he should have access to such information. What is important, contrary to other characters, the workers do not look for the answers and completely accept their fate. When they decide to leave the office, they finally get lost among the staircases and even meet the wandering man. His sudden appearance distracts them, but even then they are not capable of taking any action. Their lack of reflection on the abnormal situation can be read as an analogy to the lives of Japanese office workers. The author shows that many people participating in their daily routines are unable to change their miserable conditions – as in the world of dreams.

The turning point for all characters imprisoned in dream of repetitions comes when they, for the first time, notice the blue sky. The glimpse on the endless firmament brings back their memories and helps them understand the bizarre environment they were placed in. It is worth mentioning that in Japanese Buddhism the sky (*sora*, 空), translated also into English as “void”, is connected to all things beyond imagination and experience<sup>32</sup>. In this case the sky, perceived as a symbol, constitutes the final proof for the lost characters, showing that they experience dream reality. The woman searching for cat sees the sky reflected in her pocket mirror. The traveling couple finally reaches the end of the road where there is nothing but the endless, blue space. The moment of understanding comes also to the wandering man when his stroll up the winding staircase surprisingly ends up at the ground level, on the playground. Here he encounters the geometer who presents his discovery of the time and space suspension. The view of the sky appears in the playground scene symbolically – it is painted on the wall of the closest building.

All presented dreams of repetition lead to the place that is separated from the rest of the city – the workroom where the creator accomplishes his project. During work he listens to the same song that people heard vibrating in the city. It can be assumed that this melody, treated by the dreamers as a mystery, is not unusual for the architect. Therefore more striking for the viewer can be the fact that people seen in the city are represented by the paper-mâché figurines being in the possession of the creator.

<sup>31</sup> The examples of the couple (or a protagonist) lost on the motorway can be found in John Carpenter's movies or Stephen King's horror novels.

<sup>32</sup> C. Eliot Charles, *Japanese Buddhism*, London, New York 2005.



The human-form models are stored in the box, resembling leaden soldiers in a child's room. It is also clear that the characters gathered in the strange city have no free will. At the end of the conversation between the geometer and the wanderer, the first man suddenly notices the train passing by, what makes him jump up and run towards the machine to check where it is going. The next scene shows the architect of the city putting the figurine of the geometer away from the wanderer. The creator's act, analyzed in the context of "a dream of the other person", can be understood as a preventive action. The demiurge does not allow his prisoners to release themselves from his bonds.

What is more, the actions of the architect are unpredictable. In the final stage of his project, when the maquette of the city is ready, he starts playing with the figurines. The man forces his creations to face the fact that they are imprisoned in a wicked dream. At the same time, though, he also tries to minimize their suffering from the repetition. The demiurge decides to paint black the figurine of a cat and place it in the city, giving hope back to the searching woman.

In the mentioned scene Goshima creates a very clear reference to the thought of Chuag Chou, presented at the beginning of this paper. As Joel Vacheron indicates in his article, the art of Kazuhiro Goshima contains a lot of influences of Zen philosophy, among which the most important part is connected with searching for the immanent power that governs people's existence<sup>33</sup>. The concept of *Different Cities*, a place where the people dream their worst dreams of repetition, shows the artist's effort to present the answer on the screen.

## DREAM REPRESENTATION STRATEGIES

Questioning the procedures of recognition the dream from reality by human perception, Goshima presents his own choice of strategies introducing the world of abstraction and irrational. As for Japanese author's film the most important suspension is connected with time, he uses acceleration and deceleration of the camera movement. He also underlines the fact that in *Different Cities* geographical criteria and the definition of urban environment are no longer useful, as everything can change under the touch of the creator. The characters are often filmed from the ground perspective what brings the uncanny atmosphere and the feeling of imprisonment among enormously high buildings.

Another important strategy used by Goshima is connected with the role of light and shadow. The unreal atmosphere of the city occupied by dreamers is built by the artificial radiance of the street lamps and indoor ceiling lighting. Sterile, clean walls and pavements make the architecture look futuristic and inhospitable. By contrast, the creator's work room is bathed in a warm sunlight.

Finally, it is worth to mention the melody of the city. At the beginning of the film the only sound accompanying the characters is a synthetic beeping tune that resembles the phone ring. Later on, when the geometer discovers the music on the playground, the repeated song comes back and appears in the car of the travelling couple

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<sup>33</sup> J. Vacheron, op. cit., p. 43.



and at the creator's workshop. It can be observed that when the geometer discovered the melody, another truth about the dream world was unveiled to the characters. This act can be perceived as a transmission of knowledge, which is beneficial to society, even though its members do not know each other. When it comes to the role of sound, dialogues and monologues also play an important role in Goshima's movie. Every character expresses his disorientation in a different way. The author introduces rather talkative characters (the geometer and the woman in the car), as well as the ones who do not feel the need to produce words (the woman searching for the cat). The ability to express the feelings through speech can be connected with the author's observation of the people's reaction to the information overload. The wandering man is only able to repeat simple questions, while the cat's owner is overwhelmed by her loss and unable to produce a sound.

## CONCLUSION

As Joel Vacheron comments in his article, Kazuhiro Goshima questions the procedures stabilizing humans' perceptions of urban reality. He also invites the viewer to reconsider forms that govern our existence, among which the dreams play an important part<sup>34</sup>. The director's conception of the dream world, where people are imprisoned in their repetition nightmares, also establishes an answer to a philosophical and religious question concerning the truth of reality. In his disturbing vision the participants of the dream cannot understand the reality because they do not know all procedures introduced by the creator. Their lack of understanding prevents them from obtaining the "enlightenment", so that they are bound to stay in the city. Goshima created an unusual experimental film in which the complicated symbolic meaning serves as a pretext to contemplate what is beyond the edge of the visible.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibidem.

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## SUMMARY

INTERCHANGEABLE DIMENSIONS OF THE MEGALOPOLIS.  
THE WORLD OF DREAMS IN KAZUHIRO GOSHIMA'S FILM „DIFFERENT CITIES”

The purpose of this article is to analyze Kazuhiro Goshima's experimental film *Different Cities* in the context of the role of dreams in Japanese culture. Starting with the presentation of the anthropological research concerning the most often repeated dreams in Japanese culture, the author describes the behavioral patterns of the characters and places them in the broader philosophical and religious context. The dream world created by the director is presented in terms of the experiences of the people imprisoned in the megalopolis where all relational and geographical criteria depend on the imagination of the mysterious creator. The paper focuses on Goshima's way of presenting the dreams and the dreamers' perceptions of the urban environment.